

Basavanna ಬಸವಣ್ಣ	
<div><span></span></div> <div><span></span></div>	
Religion	Hinduism
Sect	<i>Lingayat-Shaivism</i> (Hinduism) <sup>[1]</sup>
Known <span> </span> for	Bhakti movement in south India
Personal	
Born	<span>1105 CE</span> <sup>[2]</sup> <div>Basavana Bagewadi, in Bijapur district, Karnataka, India</div>
Died	<span>1167 CE</span> <sup>[2]</sup> <div>Kudalasangama, Karnataka, India</div>
Literary works	<i>Vachanaas</i>
Occupation	Statesman, poet, social reformer, philosopher

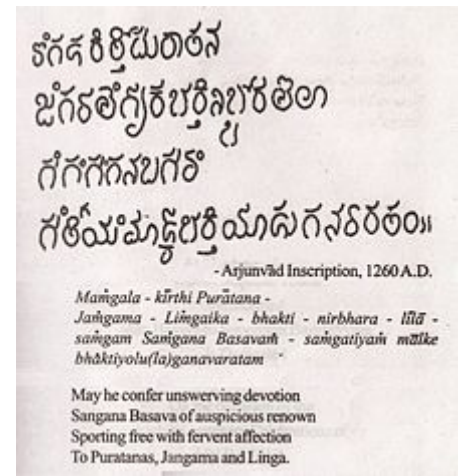
## Early life

Basava was born about 1105 CE<sup>[2]</sup> in the town of Bagevadi in north Karnataka, to Madarasa and Madalambike, a Kannada Brahmin family devoted to Hindu deity Shiva.<sup>[9][12][13]</sup> He was named Basava, a Kannada form of the Sanskrit *Vrishabha* in honor of Nandi bull (carrier of Shiva) and the local Shaivism tradition.<sup>[13]</sup>

Basava grew up in Kudalasangama (northeast Karnataka), near the banks of rivers Krishna and its tributary Malaprabha.<sup>[9][12]</sup> Basava spent twelve years studying in a Hindu temple in the town of Kudalasangama,<sup>[12]</sup> at Sangameshwara then a Shaivite school of learning, probably of the *Lakulisha-Pashupata* tradition.<sup>[13]</sup>

Basava married a cousin from his mother side. His wife *Gangambike*,<sup>[12]</sup> was the daughter of the prime minister of *Bijjala*, the Kalachuri king.<sup>[9][13]</sup> He began working as an accountant to the court of the king.<sup>[12]</sup> When his maternal uncle died, the king invited him to be the chief minister. The king also married Basava's sister named *Padmavati*.<sup>[9]</sup>

As chief minister of the kingdom, Basava used the state treasury to initiate social reforms and religious movement focussed on reviving Shaivism, recognizing and empowering ascetics who were called Jangamas.<sup>[9]</sup> One of the innovative institutions he launched in 12th century, was the *Anubhava Mantapa*, a public assembly and gathering, which attracted men and women across various walks of life, from distant lands to openly discuss spiritual, economic and social issues of life.<sup>[8]</sup> He composed poetry in local language, and spread his message to the masses. His teachings and verses such as *Kāyakavé Kailāsa* (Work is the path to *Kailash* (bliss, heaven), or Work is Worship) became popular<sup>[14]</sup>



Arjunavād inscription of the Seuna king Kannara, dated 1260 A.D. An inscription related to Basava and his family details. Names references Basavaraj and Sangana Basava.

## Literary works

Several works are attributed to Basava, which are revered in the Lingayat community. These include various *Vachana* (literally, "what is said")<sup>[2]</sup> such as the *Shat-sthala-vachana* (discourses of the six stages of salvation), *Kala-jnana-vachana* (forecasts of the future), *Mantra-gopya*, *Ghatachakra-vachana* and *Raja-yoga-vachana*.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Hagiography

The *Basava Purana*, a Telugu biographical epic poem, first written by Palkuriki Somanatha in 13th-century,<sup>[16]</sup> and an updated 14th century Kannada version, written by Bhima Kavi in 1369, are sacred texts in Lingayatism.<sup>[3][17]</sup>

Other hagiographic works include the 15th-century *Mala Basava-raja-charitē* and the 17th-century *Vrishabhendra Vijaya*, both in Kannada.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Authenticity

Scholars state that the poems and legends about Basava were written down long after Basava's death.<sup>[16]</sup> This has raised questions about the accuracy and creative interpolation by authors who were not direct witness, but derived their work relying on memory, legends and hearsay of others. Michael states, "All *Vachana* collections as they exist at present are probably much later than the 15th-century [300 years post-Basava]. Much critical labor needs to be spent in determining the authenticity of portions of these collections".<sup>[18]</sup>

# Basava Philosophy

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Basava grew up in a Brahmin family with a tradition of Shaivism.<sup>[9][12]</sup> As a leader, he developed and inspired a new devotional movement named *Virashaivas*, or "ardent, heroic worshippers of Shiva". This movement shared its roots in the ongoing Tamil Bhakti movement, particularly the Shaiva Nayanars traditions, over the 7th- to 11th-century. However, Basava championed devotional worship that rejected temple worship and rituals led by Brahmins, and replaced it with personalized direct worship of Shiva through practices such as individually worn icons and symbols like a small linga. This approach brought Shiva's presence to everyone and at all times, without gender, class or caste discrimination.<sup>[7][19]</sup> Basava's poem, such as Basavanna 703, speak of strong sense of gender equality and community bond, willing to wage war for the right cause, yet being a fellow "devotees' bride" at the time of his or her need.<sup>[20]</sup>

A recurring contrast in his poems and ideas is of *Sthavara* and *Jangama*, that is, of "what is static, standing" and "what is moving, seeking" respectively. Temples, ancient books represented the former, while work and discussion represented the latter.<sup>[21]</sup>

The rich  
will make temples for Shiva,  
What shall I,  
a poor man do?

My legs are pillars,  
the body the shrine,  
the head a cupola of gold.

Listen, O lord of the meeting rivers,  
things standing shall fall,  
but the moving ever shall stay

— Basavanna 820, Translated by Ramanujan<sup>[22]</sup>

Basava emphasized constant personal spiritual development as the path to profound enlightenment. He championed the use of vernacular language, Kannada, in all spiritual discussions so that translation and interpretation by the elite is unnecessary, and everyone can understand the spiritual ideas.<sup>[7]</sup> Basava approach is akin to the protestant movement, states Ramanuja.<sup>[21]</sup> His philosophy revolves around treating one's own body and soul as a temple; instead of making a temple, he suggests being the temple.<sup>[21]</sup> His trinity consisted of *guru* (teacher), *linga* (personal symbol of Shiva) and *jangama* (constantly moving and learning).

Basava established, in 12th-century, *Anubhava Mantapa*, a hall for gathering and discussion of spiritual ideas by any member of the society from both genders, where ardent devotees of Shiva shared their achievements and spiritual poems in the local language.<sup>[7]</sup> He questioned rituals, dualism and externalization of god, and stated that the true god is "one with himself, self-born".

How can I feel right  
about a god who eats up lacquer and melts,  
who wilts when he sees fire?

How can I feel right  
about gods you sell in your need,  
and gods you bury for fear of thieves?

The lord of the meeting rivers,  
self-born, one with himself,  
he alone is the true god.

While Basava rejected rituals, he encouraged icons and symbols such as the wearing of *Istalinga* (necklace with personal linga, symbol of Shiva), of *Rudraksha* seeds or beads on parts of one body, and apply *Vibhuti* (sacred ash on forehead) as a constant reminder of one's devotion and principles of faith.<sup>[24]</sup> Another aid to faith, he encouraged was the six-syllable mantra, *Shivaya Namah*, or the *shadhakshara mantrawhich is Om Namah Shivaya*<sup>[24]</sup>

## Bhakti marga as the path to liberation

The Basava Purana, in Chapter 1, presents a series of impassioned debates between Basava and his father.<sup>[25]</sup> Both declare Hindu *Sruti* and *Smriti* to be sources of valid knowledge, but they disagree on the *marga* (path) to liberated, righteous life. Basava's father favors the tradition of rituals, while Basava favors the path of direct, personal devotion (*bhakti*).<sup>[26]</sup>

According to Velcheru Rao and Gene Roghair,<sup>[26]</sup> Basava calls the path of devotion as "beyond six systems of philosophy. *Sruti* has commended it as the all-seeing. Its subtle form is beyond praise. Its eternally blissful form is the beginning of the beginning. The form of that divine linga is the true God. The *guru* [teacher] of the creed is an embodiment of kindness and compassion. He places God in your soul, and he also places God in your hand. The six-syllabled *mantra*,<sup>[27]</sup> the supreme mantra, is its mantra. The dress – locks of hair, ashes and rudrashaka beads – place a man beyond the cycle of birth and death. It follows the path of liberation. (...) This path offers nothing less than liberation in this lifetime."<sup>[26]</sup>

## Roots in the Vedas and Vedanta philosophy

Sripati, a Virasaiva scholar, explained Basava's philosophy in *Srikara Bhasya*, using the *Vedanta Sutra*, suggesting Basava's Lingayat theology to be a form of qualified nondualism, wherein the individual *Atman* (soul) is the body of God, and that there is no difference between Shiva and Atman (self, soul), Shiva is one's Atman, one's Atman is Shiva.<sup>[24]</sup> Sripati's analysis places Basava's views in *Vedanta* school, in a form closer to the 11th century *Vishishtadvaita* philosopher *Ramanuja*, than to *Advaita* philosopher *Adi Shankara*. However, Sripati's analysis has been contested by other scholars.<sup>[24]</sup>

Basava refers to the *Śruti* (*Vedas*) as the foundation of his beliefs, but also states that the *Vedas* are texts, nature is just nature, and neither is God. He, state Velcheru Rao and Gene Roghair, in Chapter 6 of Basava Purana asserts, "*Śruti* says, *Rudra* is the only one; why even consider the other views. How can you say that the *Veda* is God? If it were true, how could it have been stolen by Somaka? If water is God, how can you account for its tendency to fall down, and how can it be contained in the palm of a person's hand? If fire is God, how is it that it can be extinguished, and how can it eat all kinds of things indiscriminately?"<sup>[28]</sup>

## Legacy and influence



Kudala sangama in Bagalkot district, where Basava's samadhi is located.

The Lingayats, also known as *Virasaivas* or *Veerasaivas*, traditionally believe that Basava was the founder of their tradition.<sup>[2][29]</sup> However, modern scholarship relying on historical evidence such as the Kalachuri inscriptions state that Basava was the 12th-century poet philosopher who revived and energized an already existing tradition.<sup>[2][3][9]</sup> The community he helped form is also known as the *Sharanas*. The community is largely concentrated in *Karnataka*, but has migrated into other states of India as well as overseas. Towards the end of the 20th century, Michael estimates, one sixth of the population of the state of Karnataka, or about 10 million people, were Lingayat Hindus, or of the tradition championed by Basava.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Social reform

Basava advocated that every human being was equal, irrespective of caste, and that all forms of manual labor was equally important.<sup>[30]</sup> Michael states that it wasn't birth but behavior that determined a true saint and Shaiva bhakta in the view of Basava and *Sharanas* community.<sup>[31]</sup> This, writes Michael, was also the position of south Indian Brahmins, that it was "behavior, not birth" that determines the true Brahmin.<sup>[31]</sup> One difference between the two was that Sharanas welcomed anyone, whatever occupation he or she might have been born in, to convert and be reborn into the larger family of Shiva devotees and then adopt any occupation he or she wanted.<sup>[31]</sup>

## Synthesis of diverse Hindu traditions

Basava is credited with uniting diverse spiritual trends during his era. Jan Peter Schouten states that *Virashaivism*, the movement championed by Basava, tends towards monotheism with Shiva as the godhead, but with a strong awareness of the unity of the Ultimate Reality.<sup>[32]</sup> Schouten calls this as a synthesis of Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita and Shankara's Advaita traditions, naming it *Shakti-Vishishtadvaita*, that is monism fused with Shakti beliefs.<sup>[32]</sup> An individual's spiritual progress is viewed by Basava's tradition as a six-stage *Satsthalasiddhanta* which progressively evolves the individual through phase of the devotee, to phase of the master, then phase of the receiver of grace, thereafter Linga in life breath (god dwells in his or her soul), the phase of surrender (awareness of no distinction in god and soul, self), to the last stage of complete union of soul and god (liberation, mukti).<sup>[32]</sup> Basava's approach is different than Adi Shankara, states Schouten, in that Basava emphasizes the path of devotion, compared to Shankara's emphasis on the path of knowledge – a system of monistic Advaita philosophy widely discussed in Karnataka in the time of Basava.<sup>[33]</sup>

Jessica Frazier et al. state that Basava laid the foundations of a movement that united "Vedic with Tantric practice, and Advaitic monism with effusive Bhakti devotionism"<sup>[34]</sup>

## Icons and symbols

Basava advocated the wearing of *Ishtalinga*, a necklace with pendant that contains a small Shiva linga.<sup>[30]</sup> He was driven by his realisation; in one of his Vachanas he says *Arive Guru*, which means one's own awareness is his/her teacher. Many contemporary Vachanakaras (people who have scripted Vachanas) have described him as *Swayankrita Sahaja* which means "self-made".

## Monuments and recognition

- The then President of India Abdul Kalam inaugurated Basaveshwar's statue on 28 April 2003 in the Parliament of India
- Basaveshwara is the first Kannadiga in whose honour a commemorative coin has been minted in recognition of his social reforms. The former Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh was in Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka to release the coins.
- On 14 November 2015 The Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi inaugurated the statue of Basaveshwara along the bank of the river Thames at Lambeth in London.<sup>[35][36][37]</sup>
- Basava Dharma Peetha has constructed 108 ft (33 m) tall statue of Basavanna in Basavakalyan.



A necklace with pendant containing linga symbol of Shiva are worn by devotees of the tradition championed by Basava. Rudraksha beads (shown above) and *Vibhuti* (sacred ash on forehead) are other reminder of one's principles of faith.<sup>[24]</sup>



The bust of Basaveshwara, unveiled in London in 2015, facing the UK Parliament

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